

Section 2: The disability movement

Disability and society

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Learning objectives/key points

- Understanding the meaning and the main goals of the disability movement
 - A movement by disabled people
 - Opposition to charity
 - Deinstitutionalization and independent living
 - Desegregation, accessibility and equal rights
- Key actors and organizations in the UK, in the US and internationally
- Repertoire of collective action

The disability movement

Have you heard about the disability movement in your social movement courses?

What disability organizations do you know about? Are they organizations for and/or by disabled people? What are their goals?

General definitions of social movements

« organized efforts to promote or resist **change** in society that rely, at least in part, on **noninstitutionalized forms of political action** » (Marx and McAdam, 1994)

« a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural **conflict**, on the basis of a **shared collective identity** » (Diani, 1992)

Exploring the goals and meaning of the disability movement through four of its slogans

« Nothing
about us
without us »

« Piss on pity »

« Independent
Living »

« At least Rosa
Parks could get
on the bus »

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« Nothing about us without us » → A movement **by** disabled people

« If we learned one thing from the civil rights movement in the US, it's that when others speak for you, you lose » (Ed Roberts quoted by Charlton, 1998, p.3)

→ Conflict of leadership with earlier disability organizations. Ex: the creation of DPI in 1981: At the Rehabilitation International conference in Winnipeg, 200 disabled delegates walk out to protest their lack of representation in the International Year of Disabled Persons organising committee → creation of Disabled peoples' international (DPI), an international NGO *of* disabled people.

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« Piss on pity » / « Rights not charity »: denouncing paternalistic protection as an impediment to the individual quest for self-worth and the collective quest for equal rights.

Ex.: Former poster children protest against the Telethon: Mike Ervin , « The kids are all right »

<http://www.thekidsareallright.org/watch.html>

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« Independent living »: what is it about?

- Deinstitutionalization → living in one's home rather than in a nursing home

Illustration: Sarah Barton « Defiant lives » trailer, 2017 (documentary on the the history of the disability rights movement in Australia, the US and the UK)
<https://youtu.be/6L-yhQvl754>

- Public provision for hiring personal assistants
- Autonomy in the hiring and management of PAs (value of the DP's expertise in their needs)

See section 9
on care
& (DeJong,
1979)

Opposition to institutionalization as an initial leverage for protest in the UK

Paul Hunt's 1972 letter to *the Guardian*:

Severely physically handicapped people find themselves in isolated, unsuitable institutions, where their views are ignored and they are subject to authoritarian and often cruel regimes.

I am proposing the formulation of a consumer group to put forward nationally the views of actual and potential residents of these successors to the workhouse.

(Guardian, 20 September 1972)

- Creation of the Union of the physically impaired against segregation (UPIAS) in 1972
- British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) in 1982, now known as the UK Disabled people's council (UKDPC).

Independent Living (US)

- First Independent Living Center created by Ed Roberts in Berkeley in 1972
- Then in many other US cities
- State funded
- Centers by and for disabled people (consumer-controlled)
 - Personal assistant services
 - Peer counseling
 - Advocacy...

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« At least Rosa Parks could get on the bus » (ADAPT, 1990s)

→ Goals: desegregation, accessibility and equal rights

→ Means: combination of street protest and strategic litigation

→ Example: the implementation of section 504 of the 1973 rehabilitation Act

Mobilization around the implementation of section 504 of the 1973 rehabilitation Act

- Section 504 mandates “that people with physical and mental disabilities must have equal access to programs and activities supported with federal funds” → “the first major civil rights legislation for disabled people” (Scotch, 2001, p. 3)
 - Main impact on the accessibility of federally funded facilities and programs.
 - The Nixon administration refused to fund the implementation of this section → mass protest in 1977 to ensure the signature of the regulation → sit-ins in most of the HEW offices around the country (25 sit-in in San Francisco, supported by the Berkeley Center for Independent Living)
- See Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, “The power of 504”
<https://youtu.be/52XqupjXHIM>
- Then lawsuits and street protest to obtain accessible transportation (ex Disabled in Action (DIA), ADAPT)

Obstacles to mobilizing

- Medical model: disability as a functional limitation to be overcome individually → lack of identification, negative identity
- Historical social status of DP as passive victims
- Logistical obstacles: access to transportation and communication
- Isolation
- Diversity of the group (types of impairment, intersection with other social inequalities)

Issues and rights claims

Main areas of mobilization

- De-institutionalization and access to independent living
- Access to mainstream education
- Access to employment and non-discrimination
- Accessibility of transportation and public spaces
- Living income/social rights

An extension of the agenda of previous disability organizations (rehabilitation, special education, institutionalization)

Rights framing

A diverse repertoire of collective action

- Street protest
- Strategic litigation
- Service provision (Centers for Independent Living)
- Arts & culture (see section 11)

Main organizations of the disability movement in the UK

- Disablement income group (1965)
- Union of the physically impaired against segregation (UPIAS, 1972) (Paul Hunt, Vic Finkelstein)
- British council of organisations of disabled people (BCODP, 1982) → UK Disabled people's council (UKDPC)
- Liberation network of disabled people (created by Micheline Mason in 1979)
- Single-impairment groups
- Local centres for independent living

Main organizations of the disability movement in the US

- Centers for independent living (CIL): first one created by Ed Roberts in Berkeley in 1972
- Disabled in Action (DIA, created by Judith Heumann in 1970)
- Disability rights education and defense fund 1979
- ADAPT 1983 (American disabled for accessible public transit)
→ ADAPT 1990 (American disabled attendant programs today)
- Justice for all (JFA) 1995

The disability movement internationally

- 1981 Disabled people's International (DPI)
- Transnational activism notably led to adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006 (see section 6 on global disability rights)

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